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# Was Ford Conned On Chile?

By Tom Wicker

WASHINGTON—The disclosure that the Central Intelligence Agency financed the series of strikes that preceded the overthrow of President Allende in Chile ought to make Gerald Ford hide his face. Either he has been conned by the C.I.A. into grossly misleading the American people and giving his approval to international gangsterism, or he did it on his own.

Mr. Ford, confirming at his recent news conference that the C.I.A. had carried out covert operations in Chile, suggested that it happened "three or four years ago" and that it was merely an attempt to "assist the preservation of opposition newspapers and electronic media and to preserve opposition political parties."

The facts are that the Allende Government did not try, as Mr. Ford charged it did, to "destroy opposition news media . . . and to destroy opposition political parties." The parties continued to function throughout the Allende regime. No Government censorship of the press was established. A one-day shutdown of an opposition paper, El Mercurio, was made possible by a libel law passed in the previous regime of Eduardo Frei, who was supported by the C.I.A.

Even that one-day shutdown did not occur until June 22, 1973, just a few months before the military coup that overthrew Mr. Allende. The Inter-American Press Association said then that the shutdown was the "first deliberate attempt to silence or intimidate" El Mercurio. Mr. Allende had been elected in 1970.

The Ford statement was misleading in every particular. Whatever pressures Mr. Allende occasionally brought on the opposition press, he imposed no censorship and made no attempt to "destroy" it. He did not try to destroy opposition parties. The C.I.A. intervention was not "three or four years ago." It was by no means

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